

November 10, 2005

## **STENEHJEM ISSUES CEASE AND DESIST ORDER AGAINST INTERNATIONAL "GOVERNMENT GRANTS" CON ARTISTS**

BISMARCK – In response to a recent dramatic increase in fraudulent government grant solicitations, Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem has issued a Cease & Desist Order against a group of international scam artists targeting North Dakota consumers.

Telemarketers variously identifying themselves as "firstnationalgrant.com," Advantage America, Grant Management Network, Lakeshore Media Group, Inc., "mygrantmanagement.com" and a variety of other names have violated North Dakota's Consumer Fraud laws and the state's Do Not Call law. Attorney General Stenehjem has determined several individuals are involved in the scams, including Jody Robert Overland (Montreal), Joseph Mangiacotti (Worcester, Massachusetts), and Ken Anthony Gomes (Montreal). Gomes is believed to have fled to Antigua in the West Indies.

The Cease and Desist Order bars the scam artists from doing business in North Dakota or making any more calls to North Dakota citizens.

"Our best defense against telemarketing fraud is an informed public," Stenehjem said. "We want to get the word out across the state to beware of these fraudulent government grant offers."

Although the details of the calls are all slightly different, the scammers call North Dakota citizens promising a "government grant" in the amount \$12,500 to \$200,000. Individuals are asked to provide bank account information and pay "processing fees" in amounts ranging from \$49 to \$299. The con artists then electronically transfer the processing fees out of the consumer's bank account but the non-existent grant is never received.

"These individuals deliberately used call centers located outside the United States in an effort to put themselves beyond reach of law enforcement agencies and evade the law," said Stenehjem. "They are put on notice that we will continue to expose and pursue those responsible for stealing from our citizens," he continued.

For more information or to report a "government grant" phone call, contact the Consumer Protection Division toll-free at 1-800-472-2600